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ABSTRACT

The impact of the Progressive Movement of 1890-1935 on social, political, economic, and educational developments is reviewed, especially as it relates to parents of handicapped children. The paper notes how parents of the handicapped have evolved from being suspected of causing their child's handicap to becoming partners with professionals in treatment, and how they have made that transformation largely through their own individual and collective efforts. The paper describes the aims and objectives of: (1) the National Congress of Mothers; (2) parent education and child study; (3) social reformers; and (4) educational reformers. (Includes 16 endnotes.) (JDD)

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PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT: IMPETUS FOR PARENTS OF THE HANDICAPPED

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Progressive Movement:

Impetus for Parents of the Handicapped

From 1890-1935 reform-minded educators, politicians, community leaders and social workers cooperated in a loose coalition to effect social change as they embraced the general mood of reform that swept America. This movement, the Progressive Movement, had a profound impact on social, political, economic and educational developments. The parents of the handicapped seized upon these trends of reform and found in them the impetus for their own reform movement;a movement which resulted in improved social status and educational provisions for the handicapped population.

Prior to the Progressive Era, parents of the handicapped were often condemned by society . They were accused of causing their children's handicaps genetically and/or environmentally. Such accusation led to an attitude of suspicion and distrust on the part of professionals in the education field. It also led to an attitude of guarded defensiveness on the part of parents who sensed the professional's disapproval of their parenting qualifications. Trapped in their shame, parents of the handicapped mounted no organized efforts toward securing educational provisions for their children. But, influenced by the various trends of the Progressive Movement, parents of the handicapped joined together to develop their role as advocates for socio-

educational change.

Through an historical perspective it is possible to identify, trace and assess developmentally the impact the Progressive Movement had on the parents of the handicapped in becoming social change agents for their children. Specifically, this paper will examine the following influences upon parents of the handicapped: (1) the aims and objectives of the National Congress of Mothers (PTA); (2) the aims and objectives of parent education and child study; (3) the aims and objectives of social reformers; and (4) the aims and objectives of educational reformers.

National Congress of Mothers (PTA)

It was 17 February 1897, a day in the Gay Nineties. The business world was enjoying a grand and glorious feeling. Times were booming; fortunes were being made. America was growing daily in strength and wealth. Railroads were spanning the continent and factories were expanding. Millions of immigrants were pouring in from Europe to swell the reserve of cheap labor.

It was, however, America at the close of an era. The industrial revolution, for all its benefits in increasing wealth and productivity through free enterprise and technological development, nevertheless produced social side effects of appalling magnitude. The muckrackers, Upton Sinclair, Ida Tarbell

and others aroused America to disgust over the way big fortunes were being made and the way corrupt politics and business were exploiting the public.1

Beneath the gaiety lay the seed of social revolution. The women who had been fighting for suffrage, abolition of child labor and prohibition of drinking came together to inaugurate a movement directed toward the welfare of children. On 17 February 1897 the National Congress of Mothers (PTA) was born. Its original purposes included the cooperation of home and school, the securing of legislation for neglected and dependent children and the recognition on the part of the parents that parenthood was a profession necessitating study and training.2

In her welcoming address to the National Congress of Mothers, Mrs.Alice McLillan Birney echoed the sweeping reform mood of the day:

> The age in which we live is one of "movements"-- it is a time of specialized work and organized effort. It has therefore seemed to us good and fitting that the highest and holiest of all missions-Motherhood-- the family interest upon which rests the entire superstructure of human life--and the element which may indeed be designated as the foundation of the entire social fabric, should now be the subject of our reverent consideration. I refer to what is called child study-- that broad, deep theme, most worth, in all its varying phases of our study and attention.3

Child Study and Parent Education: Key to Democratic Social Reform

Child study had its beginnings with the work of G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924), psychologist and president of Clark University. He was the first to popularize the idea that the study of children would revolutionize the pedagogy of home and school.

Throughout the first few decades of the 1900s, the PTA strongly advocated the study of children by the parents, known as parent education. On a weekly basis, local chapters of the PTA would break into small study groups to discuss suggested topics of child care and management. The National Congress of Mothers Magazine, created in 1906, added further structure to the study groups. Suggested topics came under broad areas of interest. In keeping with the PTA'a avowed sense of duty and responsibility to the "blameless, dependent and neglected children," issues such as "Provisions for the Helpless and Defective," Treatment of Erring Children" and Preventive and Protective Agencies" appeared as suggested topics for discussion in a 1907 issue of the magazine.4 The care and education of children with handicapping conditions thus became a common interest to all parents. To the PTA in the Progressive Era, parent education was a lever for changing society by organizing mothers of the nation in common cause.

Inspired by this spirit of reform, other women's organizations formed in the united interest of using parent education as a vehicle to socio-educational reform. In April 1907 representatives of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the

Daughters of the American Revolution, the Council of Jewish Women, the Collegiate Alumni and the National Congress of Parents met to declare their dedication in working towards compulsory education and child labor laws.

One of the foremost leaders in social reform in this era was Jane Addams (1860-1935). In The Long Road of Women's Memory, published in 1916, Jane Addams tried to show that all women, irrespective of social class or ethnic background, were sisters-in-spirit. She assigned to women their responsibility toward their families, society and themselves. She contended that women best enrich themselves by becoming active in the democratic process. 5

By the mid-1920s, the Child Study Association of America (CSAA) was formed in New York. In 1925 it initiated the National Council of Parent Education to coordinate the many lay and professional groups in the field. It sponsored the first university course in parent education at Teachers College, Columbia in 1925. The CSAA published an influential publication ,Concerning Parents, between 1926 and 1929. It was the first mass media forum of parent education. 6

By 1932 the PTA had developed a comprehensive and systematic method for successful study in parent education groups. It encouraged the use of group leaders to work under the direction of parent education experts. Such leadership in a parent education group was seen as a challenge to the group to function effectively in a social group that was becoming concious of itself as a

potential lobby group.7 Integrated into the PTA's notion of parent education was political action.

Parent groups for handicapped children began to emerge as early as 1933. A group of five mothers in Cuyahoga County, Ohio found one another and got together in an "indignation meeting" because their children had been excluded from public school. Out of this protest came the forming of a special class sponsored by the parents themselves to serve excluded children. Parents realized that only by banding together could they bring about the widespread changes in society which were needed. They further realized that legislators and other government leaders responded to groups when they would not respond to individuals. Building on the foundation of the parent education movement, parents of the handicapped found they carried considerable weight in promoting provisions for handicapped children as a united group of intelligent, well-informed parents.8

Educational Reform

Before the turn of the century, public education was having its difficulties, especially as the social problems of the cities grew with the expanded population. The rise of compulsory education, which was designed in part to keep children off the streets with the passage of child labor laws, added to the difficulties. Discipline became difficult, and "problem children" multiplied. The first special classes established in public

schools in the United States for children with special needs were for unruly , undisciplined, or truant boys, such classes having been started in New York City in 1874 and in Cleveland in 1875. Providence, Rhode Island is credited with establishing the first "school for backward children" in 1896. It was an offshoot of a "school for special discipline and instruction" for behavioral cases that was opened in the spring of 1894. In reality, however, it became a place to send the "mental deficients." There followed in rapid succession the establishment of special classes for the blind (Chicago 1896), orthopedically handicapped (Chicago 1899), speech defectives (New York 1908) epileptics (Baltimore 1909), partically sighted (Massachusetts 1920) and the hard of hearing (Massachusetts 1920).9

By 1922, 133 cities in twenty-three states were reported by the U. S. Office of Education to have enrollments of 23,252 pupils in special education classes of all types. State laws providing for special education of retarded children began with New Jersey in 1911 and extended to fourteen states by 1930.

The state laws varied widely. Most of them initially made provisions for special classes only on a permissive basis and without special subsidy. Some states financed excess costs in one form or another; some did not. Some provided teacher training and state supervision; others did not. Practices within cities and from school to school were extremely diverse.10

The one characteristic that was nearly universal to 1930 was the right of the school to exclude a child who was judged

"ineducable", incapable of making discernible progress in the formal academic curriculum. The treatment and training of these types of children was not even considered a responsibility of the public schools. Children by the thousands were excluded from public education, and almost exclusively confined to state and private schools. Without the entry of the federal government, progress in this area would have remained meager, slow and uneven. A landmark White House Conference in 1930 gave fresh impetus to the twin fields of child welfare and parent education. 11

Called by President Hoover, the 1930 White House Conference on Child Health and Protection was attended by three thousand leaders in the fields of health, education, and the social services. Its purpose was to study the present status of the health and well-being of children in the United States; to report what was being done for the health and protection of every American child; and to recommend what more ought to be done and by what means.

The core of the White House Conference was the Children's Charter, which delineated the rights for every child "under the protection of the American flag." Included in these rights were: (1) the right to an education based on individual needs, (2) the right to parents trained to the job of parenthood, and (3) the right to specialized care if the child is handicapped.

Realizing the importance of addressing the issues of all types of exceptional children and bowing to the "steadily growing interest of the general public, particularly the parents," the

White House Conference on Child Health and Protection formed a Committee on Special Classes. Its purpose was to study conditions needing amelioration and to effect recommendations. The Committee's report echoed the socio-educational reform spirit of the Progressive Movement:

> We are still at the very beginning of this new phase of education and when it is realized by the public generally that it is sound public policy, not charity, to provide special treatment and training for all types of exceptional children, steps will be taken to enable every child to receive the type of education best fitted to his intellectual and physical needs. 12

The report lamented that in its goal of informing the public to the possibilities of educating the handicapped child, it would become evident that "the vast majority of the people would not believe that the handicapped child is worth educating." The report concluded that only if special education was seen as a given policy found to be beneficial to society, as well as to the individual affected, would it receive adequate support. 13

Elise Martens, Senior Specialist in Education of Exceptional Children, Office of Education, discussed this socio-economic aspect of providing public education to all handicapped children:

> This army of children who are today serious deviates in mental, physical, or temperamental traits will one day become an army of adults and a very real part of the great citizenry of our democracy. Shall they be a contributing part of our social life, or shall they become liabilites that will drain the resources of society? Shall we spend our money today to educate them aright to social efficiency, or shall we spend it for almshouses, hospitals,

reformatories, and prisons to house them when they are grown? 14

Martens did not limit the national conception of educational opportunity to economic aspects only. Embracing the Child-Centered interests in Individual Differences as expressed by Dewey and Kilpatrick, she continued:

> Happiness, contentment, adjustment, achievement- these are some of the key words which apply to the education of every child, no less to the handicapped than to the normal. If the medium which will secure such results for one group fails with another, then it is the medium that should be changed, not the result. But the result always is to be expressed in terms of the child rather than the children-
> in terms of individual child life, child attitudes, child success in keeping with his ability to succeed rather than in terms of certain group standards of achievement. 15

By 1932, the Progressive Movement had set the stage for the rise of the parents of the handicapped as socio-political-educational change agents. Elise Martens publicly called for the collective action of the parents. She decalared that parents held the key to determining how much would be done in realizing the essentials of a program for exceptional children. Paralleling the needed actions of the parents with the trends of the progressive movement, Martens declared:

> There is no body of people that would have greater weight in promoting provisions for exceptional children than a united group of intelligent, well-informed parents who have the interest of such children at heart. Local study groups have a real opportunity to advance cause, by giving some time to the consideration of their needs, of the nature of the provisions which are being made for them in their own community and state,

and of the provisions which should be made for them. Thus, parents will have in their hands a great power toward shaping community attitude, promoting the work of the schools, influencing state legislation, and helping to hasten the time when each one of these exceptional children will have both at home and at school that special care which is needed for his own welfare for society's best interest.16

Conclusion

The parents of the handicapped have evolved from being suspect to becoming partners with the professionals in treatment, and have made that transformation largely through their own individual and collective efforts. Beginning with the Progressive Era, parents of the handicapped seized upon progressive reforms which included parent education, child study, and socio-educational reform. Finding the impetus for their own movement, parents of the handicapped joined together to develop their role as advocates for socio-educational change.

ENDNOTES

1. Upton Sinclair, The Jungle (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Robert Bettley, Pub., 1906), revealed the unsanitary conditions in the Chicago meatpacking industry. Ida Tarbell, The History of the Standard Oil Company (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1904), exposed the power and practices of great corporations and strengthened the movement for outlawing monopolies in the U.S.

2. J. E. Butterworth, The Parent-Teacher Association and Its Work (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929), 7.

3. National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Twenty Years Work for Child Welfare : 1897-1917, (Washington, D.C.: National Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1920), 6.

4. "Suggested Topics," National Congress of Mothers Magazine 2, no. 2 (1907):37.

5. Jane Addams, The Long Road of Woman's Memory (New York:Macmillan, 1916), 101-4.

6. Child Study Association of America, Concerning Parents(New York: New Republic, 1926-1929).

7. Max A. Peabody, "Leadership and Parent Education," Child Welfare,28,(September 1933):16.

8. Dorothy H. Moss, "Parents on the March," The Journal of the American Welfare Association 11, no. 1 (1953): 29.

9. Harry J. Baker, Introduction to Exceptional Chldren (McGraw-Hill, 1940), 52.

10. Ibid., 101.

11. Report of the Committee on Special Classes, White House Conference on Child Health and Protection (New York: The Century Co., 1932); 9.

12. Ibid., 3.

13. Ibid., 8.

14. Elise Martens, "Education of Exceptional Children," Biennial Survey of Education 1928-30, (Washington, D. C.., Department of Interior Office of Education Bulletin, 1931): 384.

15. Ibid.,384.

16. Elise H. Martens, Parents' Problems with Exceptional Children (Washington, D.C.:U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932), 59-60.